

Declaration of German Environmental and Development Organizations on the Bioeconomy Policy of the Federal Government of Germany

In our view, the current discussions on bioeconomy by the Federal Government of Germany have the potential to further undermine human and social rights and accelerate environmental degradation. An economy that increases its use of renewable raw materials can only be sustainable if this is accompanied by a socio-ecological transformation.

The signatory associations and organizations are therefore calling on the Federal Government of Germany to readjust its national and European bioeconomy strategies.

With the „Political Strategy Bioeconomy“ and the „National Research Strategy Bioeconomy 2030“, the Federal Government defined its concepts and funding objectives for an economy based on biological raw materials. Accordingly, fossil resources should essentially be replaced one-to-one with biomass. Abandoning the current energy- and resource-intensive economic model is not planned.

Bioeconomy has to be ecologically responsible and socially just

We want fundamental changes. In our understanding, economics should serve building a socially just society, while respecting ecological and planetary boundaries. The discussion about bioeconomy offers a good opportunity to start. Only if we significantly reduce the consumption of resources in all areas of the economy will we be able to sustainably meet the demand for biological raw materials - without further destroying biodiversity and the global climate.

The import of biomass from the global South, which is due to become a cornerstone of raw material supply in many bioeconomic scenarios, is highly problematic. Even today, industrial agriculture and forestry in the affected countries can lead to people being expelled and exploited and nature to be destroyed. A dramatic increase in demand for biomass would further aggravate these problems. That's why we need effective measures to reduce resource use, as well as mandatory environmental and social standards.

Current research and strategies for industrial bioeconomy focus to a larger extent? on genetic engineering and biotechnology. Although the German public largely rejects genetic modification of animals and plants because of their obvious dangers ¹, genetic engineering in the context of bioeconomy research is supported by public funds ².

With the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the global community has agreed on how the future can be socially equitable and ecologically sustainable. Any bioeconomy strategy must be based on that and may not fall behind the benchmarks set with the Agenda 2030.

No social acceptance without democratic participation

So far, the German debate on bioeconomy is largely taking place in closed circles of experts dominated by industry, industry-related research and their political allies. If bioeconomy is to become a relevant future strategy, the discussion needs to be opened up to citizens and civil society organizations. Discussing the next steps in the industrial exploitation of nature and the use of risk-prone technologies such as genetic engineering behind closed doors will lead to a loss of confidence among citizens. A future strategy such as the bioeconomy will only be accepted by the people if the necessary transformation is democratically legitimized.

The discussion opens up opportunities

A debate about the rules guiding an economy beyond fossil raw materials is appropriate and necessary. In principle, products made from biological raw materials can be better integrated into natural cycles. Last but not least, this discussion shows us that infinite economic growth is incompatible with the limits of our planet.

Our demands:

1. As the Federal Government of Germany is likely to continue providing billions to fund the promotion of the bioeconomy³, a significant share should be used to explore alternative concepts beyond the industrial market and exploitation logic. The promotion should i.a. be focused on structures for socio-ecological transformation, agro-ecology and other concepts that are nature-friendly and socially just.
2. Within the Federal Government, the Federal Ministry for the Environment (BMU) should participate equally in the development of the German bioeconomy in order to give sustainability aspects strong consideration.
3. The promotion of bioeconomy should not lead to the introduction of (green) genetic engineering through the back door and with the support of public funds.
4. Bioeconomic scenarios, which also essentially rely on the import of biomass, should be fundamentally questioned.

1 Federal Ministry for the Environment (BMU): Naturbewusstseinsstudie 2017, pages 32ff

2 www.ptj.de/projektfoerderung/biooekonomie/cobiotech

3 While the National Research Strategy BioEconomy 2030 provided about 2.4 billion Euro from 2010 to 2016 (Federal Research Ministry (BMBF) and Federal Agricultural Ministry (BMEL) (2014): Bioeconomy in Germany (page 6)), the Bioeconomy Council calls for another 3 billion Euro within six years: biooekonomierat.de/aktuelles/biooekonomie-in-dieser-legislaturperiode-weiter-voranbringen/

Initially signed by:



This declaration has been initiated by the “Civil Society Action-Forum on Bioeconomy”
More information on www.aktionsforum-biooekonomie.de

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